NUMB. XIII.

The SPECTATOR.

Dic mihi si fueras tu Leo qualis eris? Mart.

Thursday, March 15. 1711

THERE is nothing that of late Years has afforded Matter of greater Amusement to the Town than Signior *Nicolini*'s Combat with a Lion in the *Hay-Market*, which has been so often exhibited to the general Satisfaction of most of the Nobility and Gentry in the Kingdom of *Great Britain*. Upon the first Rumour of this intended Combat, it was confidently affirmed, and is still believed by many in both Galleries, that there would be a true Lion sent from the *Tower* every Opera Night, in order to be killed by *Hydaspes*; this Report, tho' altogether groundless, so universally prevailed in the upper Regions of the Play-House, that some of the most refined Politicians in those Parts of the Audience gave it out in Whisper, that the Lion was a Cousin-German of the Tyger who made his Appearance in King *William*'s Days, and that the Stage would be supplied with Lions at the publick Expence, during the whole Session. Many likewise were the Conjectures of the Treatment which this Lion was to meet with from the hands of Signior *Nicolini*; some supposed that he was to Subdue him in *Recitativo*, as *Orpheus* used to serve the wild Beasts in his time, and afterwards to knock him on the head; some fancied that the Lion would not pretend to lay his Paws upon the Hero, by Reason of the received Opinion, that a Lion will not hurt a Virgin. Several, who pretended to have seen the Opera in *Italy*, had inform'd their Friends, that the Lion was to act a Part in *High-Dutch*, and roar twice or thrice to a thorough Base, before he fell at the Feet of *Hydaspes*. To clear up a Matter that was so variously reported, I have made it my Business to examine whether this pretended Lion is really the Savage he appears to be, or only a Counterfeit.

But before I communicate my Discoveries, I must acquaint the Reader, that upon my walking behind the Scenes last Winter, as I was thinking on something else, I accidentally justled against a monstrous Animal that extreamly startled me, and upon my nearer Survey of it, appeared to be a Lion-Rampant. The Lion, seeing me very much surprized, told me, in a gentle Voice, that I might come by him if I pleased: *For* (says he) *I do not intend to hurt any body*. I thanked him very kindly, and passed by him. And in a little time after saw him leap upon the Stage, and act his Part with very great Applause. It has been observ'd by several, that the Lion has changed his manner of Acting twice or thrice since his first Appearance; which will not seem strange, when I acquaint my Reader that the Lion has been changed upon the Audience three several times. The first Lion was a Candle-snuffer, who being a Fellow of a testy, cholerick Temper over-did his Part, and would not suffer himself to be killed so easily as he ought to have done; besides, it was observ'd of him, that he grew more surly every time he came out of the Lion; and having dropt some Words in ordinary Conversation, as if he had not fought his best, and that he suffered himself to be thrown upon his Back in the Scuffle, and that he would wrestle with Mr. *Nicolini* for what he pleased, out of his Lion's Skin, it was thought proper to discard him: And it is verily believed to this Day, that had he been brought upon the Stage another time, he would certainly have done Mischief. Besides, it was objected against the first Lion, that he reared himself so high upon his hinder Paws, and walked in so erect a Posture, that he looked more like an old Man than a Lion.

The second Lion was a Taylor by Trade, who belonged to the Play-House, and had the Character of a mild and peaceable Man in his Profession. If the former was too furious, this was too sheepish, for his Part; insomuch that after a short modest Walk upon the Stage, he would fall at the first Touch of *Hydaspes*, without grappling with him, and giving him an Opportunity of shewing his Variety of *Italian* Tripps: It is said indeed, that he once gave him a Ripp in his flesh-

colour

colour Doublet, but this was only to make work for himself, in his private Character of a Taylor. I must not omit, that it was this second Lion that treated me with so much Humanity behind the Scenes.

The Acting Lion at present is, as I am informed, a Country Gentleman, who does it for his Diversion, but desires his Name may be concealed. He says very handsomely in his own Excuse, that he does not Act for Gain, that he indulges an innocent Pleasure in it, and that it is better to pass away an Evening in this manner, than in Gaming and Drinking: But at the same time says, with a very agreeable Raillery upon himself, that if his Name should be known, the ill-natured World might call him, *The Ass in the Lion's Skin.* This Gentleman's Temper is made out of such a happy Mixture of the Mild and the Cholerick, that he out-does both his Predecessors, and has drawn together greater Audiences than have been known in the Memory of Man.

I must not conclude my Narrative, without taking Notice of a groundless Report that has been raised, to a Gentleman's Disadvantage, of whom I must declare my self an Admirer; namely, that Signior *Nicolini* and the Lion have been seen sitting peaceably by one another, and smoking a Pipe together, behind the Scenes; by which their common Enemies would insinuate, that it is but a sham Combat which they represent upon the Stage: But upon Enquiry I find, that if any such Correspondence has passed between them, it was not till the Combat was over, when the Lion was to be looked upon as dead, according to the received Rules of the *Drama.* Besides, this is what is practised every day in *Westminster-Hall*, where nothing is more usual than to see a Couple of Lawyers, who have been tearing each other to pieces in the Court, embracing one another as soon as they are out of it.

I would not be thought, in any part of this Relation, to reflect upon Signior *Nicolini*, who in Acting this Part only complies with the wretched Taste of his Audience; he knows very well, that the Lion has many more Admirers than himself; as they say of the famous *Equestrian* Statue on the *Pont-Neuf* at *Paris*, that more People go to see the Horse, than the King who sits upon it. On the contrary, it gives me a just Indignation, to see a Person whose Action gives new Majesty to Kings, Resolution to Heroes, and Softness to Lovers, thus sinking from the Greatness of his Behaviour, and degraded into the Character of the *London* Prentice. I have often wished that our Tragœdians would copy after this great Master in Action. Could they make the same use of their Arms and Legs, and inform their Faces with as significant Looks and Passions, how glorious would an *English* Tragedy appear with that Action which is capable of giving a Dignity to the forced Thoughts, cold Conceits, and unnatural Expressions of an *Italian* Opera. In the mean time, I have related this Combat of the Lion, to show what are at present the reigning Entertainments of the Politer Part of *Great Britain.*

Audiences have often been reproached by Writers for the Coarseness of their Taste, but our present Grievance does not seem to be the Want of a good Taste, but of Common Sense.

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